

THE VICKSBURG DISASTER.

One of Our Special Reports from the Scene of Operations.

The Enemy's Works and Their Strength.

Our Advance Under Cover of a Furious Cannonade from the Gunboats and Field Artillery.

A TERRIBLE STRUGGLE.

Two Batteries of Nine Guns Captured by General Steele.

The Gallant Charges Made by the Union Troops.

One Half of the Fifty-fourth Ohio Volunteers Destroyed in One Fight.

THE WAY COL. WYMAN MET HIS DEATH.

Rebel Negro Sharpshooters and Their Daring.

Operations of the Ram Lioness and Her Gallant Commander.

The Withdrawal of Our Army and Navy.

Attempt of the Rebels to Blockade the Mississippi.

The Death of Commander Gwin, of the Gunboat Benton.

WHAT HE HAS DONE,

We give this morning one of our special reports of the operations on Vicksburg, with a map of the rebel positions and defenses. Another report from another correspondent will be given to-morrow if possible. These descriptions will enable the public to fully comprehend the extent of the failure of our forces at that important point.

THE GRAND BATTLE.

Our Army Correspondence.

YAZOO RIVER, Miss., Dec. 30, 1862.

Since my last communication the progress of events here has been decidedly slow, and all our operations of an exceedingly desultory character.

Our forces have been put in position and are now ready to attack the enemy in their strongholds. The effort to obtain these positions has been fraught with great difficulties at every step, and skirmishing of a light nature has been constant at various points along the lines.

The diagram I send you with this will disclose to you the exceedingly strong character of the enemy's position. The advance of our lines to a close proximity to those of the enemy has shown us that they are equally as strong in their rear as in their front. Nature has furnished them the groundwork for impregnable defenses, and, anticipating our movements with a shrewdness that does them credit, they have thrown up fortifications, dug rifle pits and planted batteries in their rear to such an extent as to render the attempt to flank them most hazardous and desperate. At Vicksburg proper, or a little below, as will be seen by the diagram, the bluffs upon which the city is partially built take their rise. These bluffs extend in a north-northeasterly direction from the point below Vicksburg, where they take their rise, to Haines' Bluffs, on the Yazoo river, a distance of twelve or fifteen miles, and are fortified throughout their entire length. The bluffs from the Mississippi and the Yazoo rivers, having an abrupt or precipitous ascent. Back of them the ground is high and broken, some of it rolling, falling off gradually to the Big Black river. The only land approach to Vicksburg from up the Mississippi is by climbing the face of these bluffs.

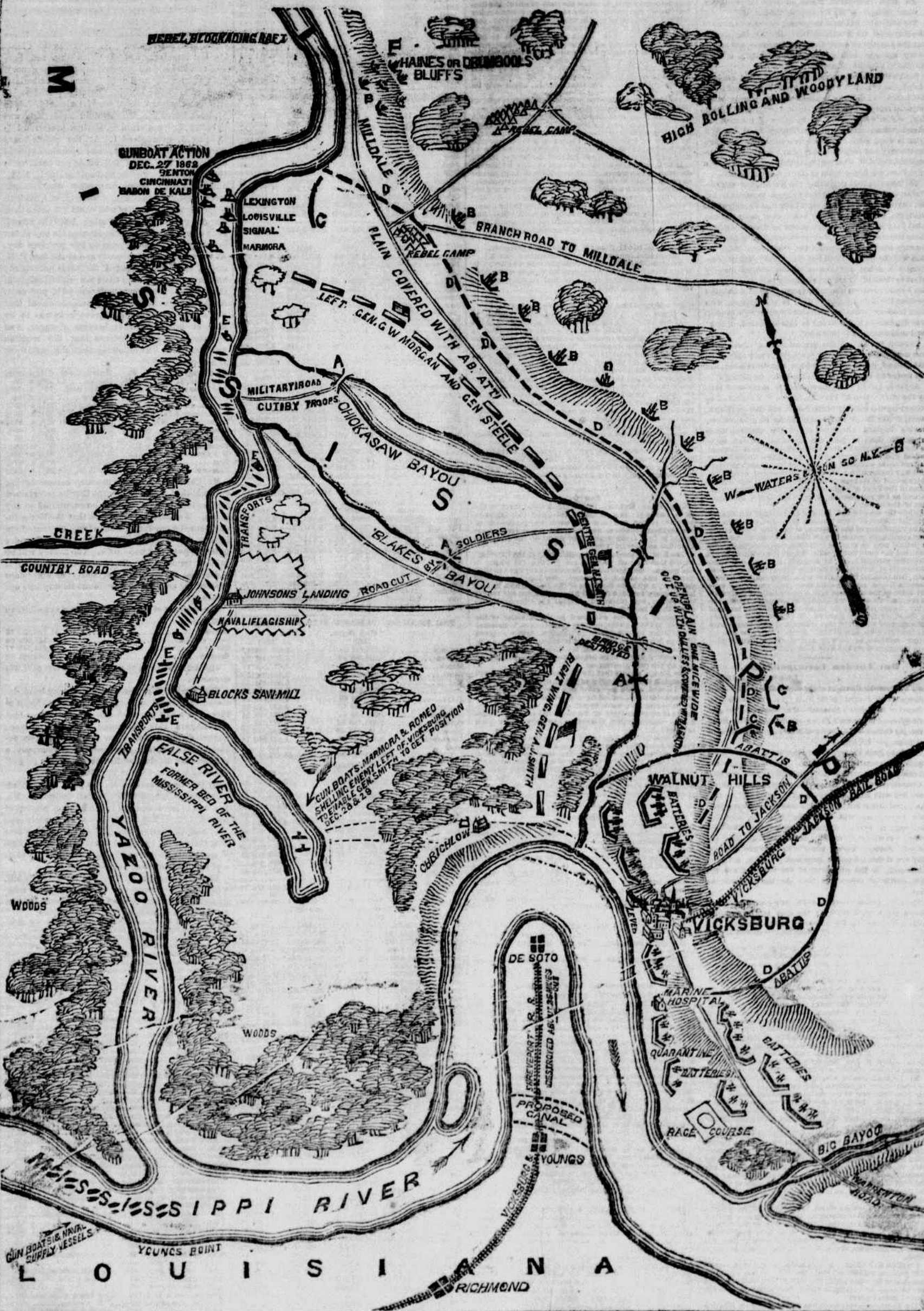
which finds its way into the Mississippi about ten miles above Vicksburg, through what is known as the Old river—its course once to have been the main channel of the Mississippi—is crooked and narrow, very deep, and has but little current. Its general course, as it approaches the mouth, is from northeast to southwest. Following its windings from its mouth, we pass along the face of the range of bluffs above alluded to, being at the junction of the Yazoo proper with Old river, about six miles from them, and gradually approaching them, until, at Haines' or Drummonds' Bluffs, as they are called on some maps, the river and bluffs come together. This point is nine miles from Vicksburg by the roads leading along the foot of the bluffs—shown in the diagram—and twenty-three miles from the Mississippi, by the course of the Yazoo river. We thus have a piece of triangular bottom land east of the Yazoo river, nine miles in length on one side, six on the other, the third side being irregular, though being, if straight, about the same length as the first side. Upon this triangle our troops are disembarked, with the purpose of getting in the rear of Vicksburg and gaining that position by such a movement.

From the Yazoo, above its junction with Old river, and in the upper half of the distance to Haines' Bluffs, the bayous set in to this triangular piece of bottom land. As they approach the base of the bluffs they intersect a third that leads along nearly parallel with the base of the hills, diverging from them as it approaches its outlet into the Mississippi, at which point it is about one mile from them.

Behind this latter bayou, and between it and the bluffs, is a plain, the timber upon which has been felled to form an abatis. This plain is cut up by deep gullies, which furnish admirable shelter to the sharpshooters of the enemy, and are fully appreciated by them. Along the base of the bluffs, throughout their entire length, the rebels have dug rifle pits, which are also defended by sharpshooters, stationed in the face of the bluffs at

OUR ATTEMPT TO TAKE VICKSBURG.

The Struggle on the Yazoo—Position of the Contending Forces—The Rebel Defences—Our Naval Operations.



REFERENCES.

AAA—Ponton bridges. BBB—Single gun batteries in face of bluff. CCC—Field works for light artillery. DDD—Rifle pits. EEE—Federal gunboats protecting transports.

short intervals from Vicksburg to Milldale, half a mile below Haines' Bluffs, where all their works terminate. In addition to these batteries they have thrown up at various commanding points along the range, both in its face and upon the summit, field works for the reception and protection of light artillery, wherever it may be needed. No effort seems to have been spared to furnish shelter to their men, and the intention seems apparent to require them to fight in the open, when it can be avoided, out of cover.

THE APPROACH TO THE REBEL WORKS.

To approach the enemy's position from any point on the Yazoo river, beyond the reach of their batteries, it is necessary to cross the bayou above alluded to. These are at present full of water and unfordable. Ponton bridges have had to be constructed at various points to enable the troops to cross. The localities of these bridges are shown in the diagram. In our marching them we first met with opposition from the enemy. Their skirmishers and sharpshooters were placed in the gullies above described, and behind logs, trees and stumps, and kept up a constant and galling fire upon our working parties. Still our men did not suffer much from their fire, our own picked marksmen giving them a good deal of annoyance and rendering them careful of showing themselves long enough to get accurate aims.

THE FIRE FROM THE BATTERIES.

In addition to this annoyance, wherever our operations were within reach the enemy opposed their batteries in the face of the bluffs upon us. But in this they were decidedly the losers, as our heaviest field artillery was

brought on to the ground wherever this occurred, and in several instances silenced their batteries and compelled them to withdraw their guns up the hill. The weather continued remarkably fine and favorable for all kinds of movements, and, notwithstanding the opposition of the enemy, our work progressed finely, and was completed at all points on Sunday night, the 28th inst.

THE GUNBOAT AND FIELD FORCE PROCEED INTO FLAT.

Yesterday the general advance was ordered, and it was supposed that it would bring on a general engagement. To divert the attention of the enemy and lessen their opposition to our advance, and also to prevent any pretended flank movements on their part, our gunboats were brought into play. The iron clads made a vigorous assault upon the batteries of Milldale, assisted by two mortar boats, and also shelled the rebel encampments in that vicinity. The Lexington and that class of boats, with long range guns, lay off the mouth of the Chickasaw bayou, and kept up a vigorous cannonading at the stream and into the woods in the direction whence the enemy would be likely to move should they attempt to turn our left flank. The Marmora and Forest fires took a position at the head of False river, and fired by the compass across the great bend in the Mississippi in the direction of Vicksburg, and to the left of it, actually preventing (as has since been learned) an attempt to turn our right flank. Our field artillery was brought into play along the entire line, in response to the vigorous firing of the enemy, and thus a continuous roar of artillery was kept up throughout the entire day. It is seldom that a more furious cannonading has been heard, and it has never been

surpassed in the war, unless at the late battle of Fredericksburg.

THE GENERAL ADVANCE.

In the midst of this thunder our forces advanced, the center and left crossing the bayou and deploying into line just beyond the range of the enemy's rifle fire, finding cover in the edge of the woods fronting on the plain covered with abatis. General A. J. Smith, commanding our right, did not cross the bayou running parallel with the bluffs, the enemy having cut the timber on this side of it, which would have exposed his position. He moved out on the road from Johnson's Ferry and deployed to the right in the woods at the edge of the abatis, and pushed his right down to the bank of the Mississippi.

OUR FIRST LINE OF BATTLE.

Was then formed on a line parallel with the enemy's position, though not so long as their line—it being about five miles in extent—and from a mile to a mile and a half from the rebel works. The accomplishment of this movement was most perfectly successful, our losses being comparatively nothing, less than one hundred men having been placed here de combat.

CRASHES FROM THE CENTRE—GEN. M. L. SMITH WORKS.

In the position thus secured our forces rested in the night, the center and left making some vigorous efforts to gain positions on the bluffs. General Morgan L. Smith, commanding the center, ordered a charge up to the foot of the bluff. The regiment having the advance met the enemy's fire just as they came to the crossing of the bayou, which they showed signs of faltering. The General, who was watching the movement, at once sprang to the head of the column, and, waving his sword, called

on the men to follow him. Scarcely had he spoken when he was struck in the thigh by a musket ball and badly wounded. He was taken from the field, and his forces fell back into their position under cover of the woods. General Smith was painfully though not badly wounded. The ball penetrated the fleshy part of the thigh, breaking no bones, but making a very ragged wound. He suffered considerably from loss of blood before his wound was dressed, and became very faint. He is now doing well, with every prospect of being able to take the field again within a couple of weeks.

GEN. A. J. SMITH TAKES COMMAND OF THE CENTER.

The division commanded by Gen. M. L. Smith was committed to the charge of Gen. A. J. Smith, after the former was wounded, and Gen. Harbridge was assigned to the command of the latter's division on the right.

ANOTHER CHARGE.

General Steele, commanding on the left of the center, made a desperate effort to gain the bluff, in which he captured two of the enemy's field works, with nine guns, but was finally compelled to fall back. His loss was but trifling, and it may be that he merely intended to reconnoitre the enemy's position preparatory to subsequent operations. If this was his object he was eminently successful. The guns he captured were by the enemy's men abandoned to him.

ON THE EXTREME LEFT.

General Morgan made some demonstrations upon the enemy's position, the nature of which I have not learned. He retired at night to the position he had taken during the day. Yesterday the battle was renewed with much

greater vigor and determination along the entire line. My position was with the right, the details of which I can more conveniently with than with the operations on any other part of the field. If, therefore, I fail in doing justice to other portions of the story, that is as fully grieved with the enemy in his stronghold, it must be attributed to the lack of omniscience on the part of your correspondent.

ON THE RIGHT.

Owing to the change of commanders, or some other cause as yet unexplained, it was late in the day before the right division was ordered into action. The gunboats Marmora and Juliet were stationed in False river to protect our flank, which, by their vigorous cannonading, they successfully accomplished. At one time the enemy was observed getting a battery into position, evidently to cover a movement on our right, when the bursting of the shells from the gunboats convinced them of the hazardous nature of the attempt, and they abandoned it.

AN ARTILLERY FIGHT.

The wagon road leading from Johnson's Ferry to Vicksburg crosses the bayou directly in front of the left of our division. The bridge at this point had been destroyed by the enemy, as also the road to a considerable extent, the bayou having been felled across it and all highways turned up. The enemy also have upon the bluff at the head of this road a field work for light artillery, ranging directly down on the course of the road, and also single gun batteries in the face of the bluff. To avoid as far as possible these obstacles, General Smith had thrown his position bridge across the bayou a little to the right of the old bridge. At this point General Harbridge massed several batteries of artillery, opening a brisk cannonade upon the rebel batteries. They replied earnestly for a while, but their fire gradually slackened as our men warmed up to their work and got more accurate elevations to their pieces and adjusted their fuses with more accuracy, and at last ceased altogether, and their cannoniers were soon hauling their guns up the hill.

A GALLANT CHARGE—BRAVERY AND FEARFUL LOSS.

At this juncture the Fifty-fourth Ohio was ordered to charge across the bridge. They obeyed the order with alacrity and courage, meeting a terrible fire of musketry from the rebel sharpshooters concealed in the gullies of the plain beyond and from the rebel infantry in their rifle pits. But the gallant Ohioans never flinched but succeeded in gaining the opposite bank. Here they were charged upon by an entire rebel brigade, against whom they contended manfully for a time, but at last were surrounded and overpowered. The regiment was in an extremely critical situation, and seemed captured for a certainty. Still they fought on, evidently determined not to surrender. They were contending against fearful odds, and their ranks were thinning rapidly. At last, when it seemed clear that they could no longer sustain themselves and would certainly be captured in a body, one of our batteries was ordered to open upon the promiscuous crowd in a moment the shells were flying bristling, hitting friend and foe indiscriminately. The fire was too hot for the rebels, and they quickly withdrew, leaving the Ohio boys upon the field. These gallant fellows, with all possible despatch, glad to escape so easily. They were sadly cut up, though, fifty per cent of their number having been killed or wounded. Seven of them were killed outright by our own shells, and a much larger number wounded, but the regiment was saved.

REINFORCEMENTS—ANOTHER FIGHT AND VICTORY.

After the withdrawal of the Fifty-fourth Ohio, the Sixth and Eighth Missouri and the Thirteenth regiments were ordered to cross. This they did promptly, the colored Eighth—battalion of every colored man, save two Missions, in the Southwest—taking the lead. The whole force crossed safely and without loss, and immediately deployed off to the left to get possession of the Vicksburg road. Scarcely, however, had they got into line when a rebel brigade came charging down the road upon their flank. The detachment quickly changed front and formed in line of battle, and accepted the challenge offered by the enemy. A brisk engagement ensued, lasting about half an hour, at the end of which time the rebels broke and fled in confusion. They were hotly pursued by the Missouri "boys," who cut them up badly, more than treble avenging the losses of the Fifty-fourth Ohio.

THE CLOSING OF THE ACTION—ON THE RIGHT.

Right being near at hand, and the enemy apparently indisposed to offer further resistance to our crossing. At this time it would have been easy to have crossed the entire division, and obtain any position that was desirable. But for some reason not explained to outsiders this was not done, but, on the contrary, orders were issued to those who had crossed to retire, and under cover of the darkness they all fell back into their old positions in the edge of the timber. Here they have remained since, no movements at all having been made to-day, only a trifling skirmish early this morning on the extreme right.

OPERATIONS ON THE CENTER.

I have been unable to learn the precise nature of the movements in the center. That division made an advance, crossed the bayou and gained the foot of the bluff. This was not accomplished without a desperate struggle, but our men were equal to the duty required of them. But after gaining this ground, probably for the same reason that governed in the recall of the troops in the right division, they were withdrawn, and night found their line where it was in the morning, under cover of the timber.

POSITION OF THE LEFT AND THEIR OPERATIONS.

The left, consisting of two divisions, General G. W. Morgan having the extreme left, and General Steele being upon his right, have been more busily engaged. They have necessarily formed a curve facing northeast and east. They have the batteries on Haines' Bluffs, at their left, and the fortifications of the bluffs with the rifle pits in their front. Opposed to them the enemy's line is nearly or quite half as long again as their own. The country road leading from Johnson's Ferry to Vicksburg runs in front of them, between them and the enemy.

WHAT WAS MADE ATTEMPTED, AND ITS RESULT.

This column has made most desperate efforts to pierce the enemy's line and gain the bluff, in order to get into the rear of the batteries on Haines' Bluffs, and, with the co-operation of the gunboats, silence those guns. There are other objects to be gained by crossing the bluff at this point. Since through the canal there would be no difficulty whatever in sending a force across to the crossing of the Vicksburg and Jackson Railroad over the Big Black river, and by the destruction of the bridge at that point cut off the enemy's retreat as well as prevent their getting reinforcements. There are some of the leading objects to be gained by getting through the rebel lines in this direction. The effort was made twice yesterday, our troops on both occasions getting well up to the enemy's line, but in both instances being overcome by the tremendous storm of artillery and musketry by which they were received and forced to retire. Our losses here have been heavy, but in any other part of the field, though I am unable to state definitely what the casualties have been in those particular divisions.

ON THE RIGHT TO THE SOUTH OF THE CENTER.

The Medical Director reports the casualties in the entire army, up to noon to-day, at seven hundred and fifty-four killed, wounded and missing. Since then a very disastrous affair occurred in the center that largely increased the number. An Ohio regiment, occupying an advanced position, were attacked by a considerable force of rebel cavalry. With scarcely any resistance at all they threw down their arms and surrendered. What aggravated the case is the fact that their fire was close at hand. A large Union reserve force came up so suddenly that the enemy had no time to gather up their arms they had captured, but, leaving them lying upon the ground, with all their other spoils, they drove their prisoners before them as a herd of cattle, and made haste to get back into their own lines. This is the first cowardly act of this campaign, and by it the rebels gain about five hundred prisoners.

DEATH OF COLONEL WYMAN.

Colonel Wyman, of the Thirtieth Illinois, acting as General Steele's staff, was shot on Sunday by rebel sharpshooters, while leading a regiment into action, and in shortly killed. The ball entered his breast, passing through his lungs. He had the reputation of being a brave and gallant officer.

A NEGRO SHARPSHOOTER.

On our right a negro sharpshooter had been observed, whose exploits are deserving of notice. His accurate marksmanship, regardless of all danger, and getting right up to a federal soldier, draws up his musket at arm's length and fires, never failing in hitting his mark. It is said that Colonel Wyman was shot by a negro, but this lacks

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